

THE HISPANIC MINISTRIES IN THE UNITED STATES

PRESENT AND FUTURE

THE PRESENT

From the very beginning the Hispanic ministries in the United States has been surrounded by ambivalence, insecurity, paternalism, and misunderstandings. But against all these odds, the ministry has flourished though it is not self-sufficient yet and has to rely on the good will of the dioceses and parishes for its support. In other words, Hispanic ministries for its most part is a ministry of dependency.

In 1990 the ministry of the Episcopal Church among Hispanic immigrants coming to the United States has evolved in different patterns that make it identifiable. I have been able to identify 5 different models which in one way or another stand within the Episcopal Church in the United States as witnesses to the commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

MODEL #1

Xp & 3. Ambrosio
This model follows the American pattern of one full-time priest, buildings and vestry. Usually the goals and objectives for the congregation have been developed either by the diocese or the organization that financially supports it. Under this model the main objective is to become a parish as it is mandated by the general Canons of the Church, and programs follow the same guidelines as any other English speaking congregation in the United States. The membership is low and middle class, and most of the time the present vicar or rector is also the founder of the congregation.

A slight variance of the above model is the Hispanic congregation that has already become an aided parish and manages its own affairs.

This model is found throughout the United States.

MODEL #2

Mason San Pablo
In this model the Hispanic congregation shares the same building with an English-speaking congregation. Within this model there are two sub-models:
a) The Hispanic congregation pays rent for the use of the building(s). There are no ties with the English-speaking congregation and the two congregations almost never gather together to conduct joint programs. The level of friction in this situation is very high, since the Hispanic congregation not only uses the space and time allocated to it but also the silver, etc. Also, the time allocated to the Hispanic congregation on Sunday usually is not favorable to attract and increase the attendance and almost no time is allocated for the development of programs during the week. b) In the second sub-model the Hispanic congregation is fully attached to the English-speaking congregation, electing Hispanic members to the vestry. Most of the time the churches selected by the diocese to develop Hispanic ministries are parishes or missions with a diminishing old congregation, buildings in disrepair, spiritually speaking at the bottom of the barrel, financially broken or marginal or perhaps with a small endowment. This type of congregation is unable to give spiritual support to a new congregation, not to speak of nurture, since they

themselves are in desperate need of nurture and spiritual revival. The situation in this model is always explosive because the Hispanic congregation tends to grow faster and is dynamic and enthusiastic which brings the desire in its members to control their own destiny and make their own decision with regard to programs and their own destiny. The intention of the diocese when initiating Hispanic ministries under these circumstances is not always altruistic or moved by the desire of ministering to the Hispanics in the community, but most of the time to keep the Episcopal Church presence in that part of the city.

Much more can be said about this model, which can be found particularly in the urban centers of the East and Northeast.

MODEL #3

Brian Samantons
This model is a different version of the two mentioned above. The Hispanic congregation starts in its own building, either an abandoned church or a store front. More than in any other model, this one is in total dependency on the financial assistance from the diocese or the sponsored organization for its support. Most of the time the diocese doesn't have a clear purpose for this ministry, except that the area is inhabited by Hispanic persons. There isn't a strategy, no goals and objectives, no support group, no supervision and almost no accountability. I may say that this model is born an orphan. It has several characteristics: a) The congregation is very small, an average of 20 to 30 persons in a good Sunday and the priest is the dominant figure who does everything. Sometimes there is a family on which the priest depends for everything. b) The stewardship is almost unknown and avoided under the pretext that the people are very poor though the same can be said of all the models described in this paper; consequently, the vicar is under constant pressure to improve the income and the membership. c) In this model the congregation never grows beyond the 4 or 5 families and the "membership" changes constantly. The only activity or program going on is the Sunday morning Eucharist.

This model is very distinctively located in the Northeast and usually found in the urban cities.

MODEL #4

This model is an adaptation of the Latin American "comunidades de base." Usually this is a diocesan program. Comunidades of 5 to 6 families are established and lay leadership is trained to head each "comunidad" as a catechist to conduct Bible studies, visitations, etc. This model usually has between 8 to 10 "comunidades" located in the periphery of the city. The members of those "comunidades" may get together each Sunday to celebrate the Holy Eucharist.

This model has the characteristic that it can survive without any financial support from the diocese, except for the priest, since the gathering place of the "comunidad" is the home of one of the families. The advantage of this model is that the lay leadership develops very strongly and with a deep sense of commitment.

In this model as much as in any other the goals and strategies should be clearly defined well before the establishment of any "comunidad." The diocese should be ready to have the right answer when they start requesting a priest of their own, a building of their own, etc.

This model is in the test level at the present time and more questions are being asked about it and will be emerging in the near future.

Variance of this model can be found in California.

MODEL #5

This model is an adaptation of model #4. A priest initiates Bible studies, forums and the Sunday Eucharist in a home or apartment at the invitation of a particular family that at the same time invites the neighbors to attend, and the priest serves as the evangelist in residence. In this model most of the time the attendance outgrows the space, forcing the diocese to rent or purchase an apartment which is then conditioned for the use of the "comunidad." Again, in this model the diocese should be ready to answer the same questions as in the previous model. And also, the diocese should have goals and objectives clearly defined before it is developed, otherwise frustration will arise and overcome the original enthusiasm and dedication of the congregation.

This model is functioning in Chicago and in the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church in Madrid, Spain.

THE FUTURE

With regard to the future of Hispanic ministries in the United States, my personal perspective is that it depends on several factors:

- 1) Recognition by the national church of the challenge that this ministry brings to the Church.
- 2) How willing the dioceses are to integrate Hispanic ministries into their diocesan strategies.
- 3) How well prepared, intellectually, spiritually, and culturally the clergy leadership is to take bold steps experimenting and advocating for this ministry.
- 4) How willing those of us involved in Hispanic ministries are to try new approaches to Hispanic congregational development.
- 5) And last but not least, the ministry of the laity needs to be uplifted if Hispanic ministries is ever going to make an impact on the Episcopal Church.

It appears to me that the above factors are crucial for the future development of the ministry among persons of Hispanic heritage. Also crucial is that this ministry should stop being an appendix to other programs, either at the national or diocesan level, and stand alone for what it is, allowing it to grow with its own identity, shaped by its own spiritual and cultural idiosyncrasies.

Otherwise it is always going to be used for the practice of patronage and for the ventilation of the frustrations of those who have been unable to make it in other areas of the Church.

I see some positive steps emerging in the national church, and these are coming from the offices of congregational development and evangelism. But a word of warning with regard to Hispanic ministries: Unless clergy and laity from outside the Church Center staff are involved and consulted, any initiative emerging from the Church Center is not going to open the doors of this field.

I am confident that in the years ahead the ministry of the Episcopal Church among persons of Hispanic heritage is going to make an impact not yet anticipated. We already see the signs in the areas of hymnology and evangelism.

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